



## WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH IN NEW MEXICO

*From The  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*



### State Profile 2002

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*Delivering on the Nation's promise:  
Safety and health at work for all people through prevention.*

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### The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

NIOSH is the primary federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related illness and injury. NIOSH is located in the Department of Health and Human Services in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The NIOSH mission is to provide national and world leadership to prevent work-related illness, injury, disability, and death by gathering information, conducting scientific research, and translating the knowledge gained into products and services. As part of its mission, NIOSH supports programs in every state to improve the health and safety of workers. NIOSH has developed this document to highlight recent NIOSH programs important to workers and employers in New Mexico.

### The Burden of Occupational Illness and Injury in New Mexico

- In New Mexico, there are approximately 792,000 individuals employed in the workforce.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2000, 35 workers died as a result of workplace injuries.<sup>2</sup>
- The transportation and public utilities industry had the highest number of fatalities, followed by construction.<sup>2</sup>
- In 1999, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate of fatal workplace injuries was 5.1 deaths per 100,000 workers – above the national average rate of 4.5 deaths per 100,000 workers.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2000, there were 29,700 nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in New Mexico.<sup>3</sup>

### The Cost of Occupational Injury and Illness in New Mexico

In 2000, the most recent year for which data are available, a total of \$136.8 million was paid for workers' compensation claims by New Mexico private insurers, self-insured employers, and state funds.<sup>4</sup> This figure does not include compensation paid to workers employed by the federal government and also underestimates the total financial burden for private sector businesses, since only a fraction of health care costs and earnings lost through work injuries and illnesses is covered by workers' compensation. Chronic occupational illnesses like cancer are substantially under-reported in workers' compensation systems because work-relatedness is often difficult to establish.

# How NIOSH Prevents Worker Injuries and Diseases in New Mexico

## Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs) and Technical Assistance

NIOSH evaluates workplace hazards and recommends solutions when requested by employers, workers, or state or federal agencies. Since 1993, NIOSH has responded to 25 requests for HHEs in New Mexico in a variety of industrial settings, including the following examples:

### *Albuquerque, New Mexico: Evaluation of Indoor Environmental Quality at a Restaurant*

In 2002, NIOSH responded to a request for an HHE regarding possible health effects such as burning eyes, throat irritation, asthma, and sinus problems from exposure to a wood-burning fireplace at a restaurant in Albuquerque, New Mexico. NIOSH provided the requestor with a document produced through the joint efforts of NIOSH and the Environmental Protection Agency that contains written guidance on preventing, identifying, and correcting indoor environmental air quality problems. NIOSH investigators also offered to provide this information to the requestor's management and suggested seeking additional assistance from other sources including the state or local health department.

### *Tesuque, New Mexico: Exposures During Bronze Casting*

In 1997, NIOSH responded to a request from the safety director of a bronze casting manufacturer in Tesuque, New Mexico, to help identify and control chemicals suspected of causing headaches and nausea among workers during pours of bronze castings. NIOSH found that air concentrations of chemicals were highest during both the mixing of the binder with sand and the pouring of bronze into the molds. NIOSH recommendations focused on use of personal protective equipment to protect against skin and inhalation exposure to aldehydes.

## Building State Capacity

### *State-Based Surveillance*

NIOSH funds the Adult Blood Lead Epidemiology and Surveillance Program (ABLES) in the New Mexico Department of Health. Through ABLES, the agency's staff track and respond to cases of excessive lead exposures in adults which can cause a variety of adverse health outcomes such as kidney or nervous system damage and potential infertility.

*Additional information regarding NIOSH services and activities can be accessed through the NIOSH home page at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html> or by calling the NIOSH 800-number at 1-800-356-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674).*

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2000.

<sup>2</sup>DOL, BLS in cooperation with state and federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1999-2000.

<sup>3</sup>DOL, BLS in cooperation with participating state agencies, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, 2000.

<sup>4</sup>National Academy of Social Insurance, *Workers' Compensation: Benefits, Coverage, and Costs, 2000 New Estimates*, May 2002.

